DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 115 346 JC 760 021

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TITLE [English Instruction in Maryland Community Colleges].
PUB DATE 27 Jan 75
NOTE 6p.; Paper presented at the English Articulation Meeting, University of Maryland, January 27, 1975

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS Articulation (Program); Composition (Literary); Educational Trends; *English Curriculum; *English Education; English Literature; *Junior Colleges; *Remedial Programs; State Surveys; *Technical Writing; Writing Skills
IDENTIFIERS Maryland

ABSTRACT

This paper reviews a 1974 tabulation of freshman English programs made by the Maryland Association of Departments of English. Of 20 schools surveyed, including almost all the Maryland community colleges, 15 offer remedial courses, 18 have remediation facilities, and 15 grant academic credit for remedial courses. All of the colleges have regular English composition courses (English 101), complemented by some sort of exemption plan. While remedial courses concentrate on sentence and rudimentary paragraph writing, English 101 is concerned with the application of standard grammatical English to thought processes involving various levels of inquiry. The case of Charles County Community College is cited as an example of successful articulation between the remedial and regular English composition courses. In spite of course success in English 101, there has been a decline in the percentage of students choosing to take literature courses. The elimination of the English literature requirement has been partly responsible for this, but the extraordinary growth of technical writing courses, of which the number of sections has quadrupled over the past four years, has had even greater impact. A trend is seen toward English department alliance with the practical rather than the fine arts. (NHM)

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Text of remarks made at January 27, 1975
English articulation meeting,
University of Maryland, College Park

William Klink

A 1974 tabulation of freshman programs made by a group now called the Maryland Association of Departments of English revealed that most Maryland community colleges offer remedial and regular freshman English courses, with many demanding that students in transfer curricula take two composition courses. In the sophomore year virtually all colleges offer for the student of English a range of choices, some more traditional than others.

Because of open enrollment, the remedial course has become the preserve of the two year college, although in fact remediation has found its way into the four year college as well. That same '74 survey cited 20 schools, among them almost all the community colleges, showing that 15 schools offer remedial courses, 18 have remediation facilities, and 15 grant academic credit (two specifying that the credit is non-transferable), two offer courses carrying one credit, another offers a course carrying 0 to 3 credits depending on the grade earned. At least two schools have more than one remedial course. The method and range of placement of students into remedial courses is quite wide, and I can find no duplication of standards for placement except at a most general level. Furthermore, there is a melange of grading systems employed, and many schools incorporate reading programs

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into their offerings.

All the schools, of course, have regular English composition courses, English 101, complemented by some sort of exemption plan. Twelve schools exempt in such a way as to grant the credit to the student. Ten use CLEP, four use SAT scores, 2 use ACT scores. It should be noted that the latter two showed no agreement on what scores were necessary to attain exemption.

Many community colleges have sequences requiring 6 credits of English (with the exceptions seeming to be Frederick and Harford) in transfer programs, the second required course consisting of the writing of analyses, critiques and the like. The tendency is to narrow the area in the second semester as most colleges gear the course to an area of rhetoric, art, or current and possibly faddish topics.

As jumbled as this picture is, the colleges have surprisingly great agreement on what is being taught. My experience in talking to my colleagues and reading their syllabi indicates that the remedial courses concentrate on sentence and rudimentary paragraph writing, while the regular English courses are concerned with the application of standard grammatical English to thought processes involving various levels of inquiry.

The cornerstone of the English sequence is clearly English 101. Typically the English 101 student sits in class with 25 others, in front of a professor who teaches two other courses like this using a reader and a handbook, who by some combination of assignments will

require 3000 words from the student by the end of the semester, and who will grade these words using the same standards as his colleague down the hall or across the state, perhaps knowing that some recent national studies show little correlation between the student's improvement in his writing skills and his taking Freshman composition, or who his teacher is, or class size, or how many words he writes, or presumably anything except I. Q. In fact, however, such studies mitigate for the diversity that one encounters around the state rather than against it since we all profess to seek a better way. My own institution is perhaps typical in its approaches to perfection.

At Charles County Community College, English 100 students are issued contracts in which they agree to finish Sentence Combining by Strong, a text that has him compose complex sentences through transformations of basic kernels. The student must complete all exercises correctly in the book and hand in his work every Friday. Additionally, he must complete the programmed book Progress in Writing by Gowen, which deals with grammar and sentence structure; and finally he must write four short, correct essays. He is given two semesters to finish the work, his grade depending upon mutual agreement between the instructor and himself.

Since this method has been in use, only 8% of all students completing English 100 at Charles County Community College fail English 101; or looking at it from a positive standpoint, 92% of the people completing English 100 pass English 101 when they take it, a high percentage when one considers that these students were

placed in English 100 because of their near illiteracy.

It could be argued that perhaps the success of these students is related to the weakness of English 101, that perhaps English 101 is a less than rigorous course at Charles County Community College. To the contrary, however, institutional research tends to show that 101 grades show a .63 correlation with CLEP scores and .47 correlation with SAT scores. In education, anything around .50 is considered significant; so the indications are that grade distributions for 101 are fairly congruent with the national scale. It follows then that standards are adequate and in agreement with national norms for English 101. Further substantiation of the quality of English 101 comes from grade point data which reveals that the grade point average for Humanities courses is only 2.37, with English alone at 2.32; by comparison Social Sciences is at 2.76, and Physical Sciences at 2.64. Simply stated, then, grades are not being given away in English 101, and achievement is a real value in this course.

As encouraging as this information might seem to English professors, there are some weak points in English course offerings. There is a decline in the percentage of students choosing to take literature courses. Part of the reason for this has been the shift in requirements so that English Literature, for example, is no longer specifically required. Having even greater impact on this situation is the fact that technical writing courses have shown extraordinary growth as students take these courses to enhance career opportunities and choose to ignore the artistic aspect of English and literature. These courses have

various titles; Business English, Career English, Technical Report Writing, Business Communications. This shift has had a dramatic impact on the kinds of courses taught. While the number of sections of sophomore literature courses at Charles County Community College has remained relatively constant over the past four years during a period of 100% enrollment increase, the number of sections of business writing courses has quadrupled. I should think this trend will continue as I expect these courses will become increasingly transferable in the future.

The English situation, then, at community colleges, if what has occurred across the state of Maryland and at Charles County Community College are valid indices, is one of success of outcome if not consistency in approach; and there is a tendency, I think, for the English Department to become allied with the pratical rather than the fine arts.

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